

Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

Winter Issue 2016

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VISION: Productive Lands Healthy Environment -- MISSION: Helping People Help the Land

USDA's top outcomes in 2015:

- Through an unprecedented voluntary conservation effort with landowners, the greater sage-grouse no longer needs Federal protection under the Endangered Species Act
- USDA's overall investment in drought disaster relief and long term conservation practices exceeded \$1.2 billion in 2015
- Leveraged \$800 million to 115 high-impact conservation projects across the nation through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- USDA invested \$20.5 million through the Conservation Innovation Grants program for 45 projects, including efforts to increase habitat for pollinators, develop new ways to attract private investment in natural resource conservation, give agricultural producers greater access to greenhouse gas markets, and help farmers and ranchers make their operations more resilient to climate change
- As of September 2015, 24.2 million acres were enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP also is protecting more than 170,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, enough to go around the world 7 times. This year marks the 30th anniversary of CRP. Since 1985, the program has sequestered an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases, equal to taking 9 million cars off the road; prevented 9 billion tons of soil from erosion, enough to fill 600 million dump trucks; and reduced nitrogen and phosphorous runoff by 95 and 85 percent, respectively
- To address long-standing allegations of past discrimination, USDA settled large-scale class-action lawsuits with Native American and African American farmers and ranchers and established a voluntary claims process for women and Hispanic farmers and ranchers, providing payments of more than \$2.5 billion combined and over \$118 million in debt forgiveness



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2015 Engineer of the Year Award

The Engineer of the Year Award is selected by Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office engineering staff based on engineering leadership, workload, quality of work and character. This year the award was renamed to honor the memory of Kevin Cook, Geotechnical Engineer, who passed away June 11, 2015. In addition, the scope of the award was changed to encompass the work of the entire Technical Service Office engineering staff (Engineers and Civil Engineer Technicians). The new wording on the award reads "Presented for Outstanding Work as a Professional Conservationist in the Field of Engineering."

The 1st Kevin R. Cook Engineer of the Year Award was presented to Lynnette Dominguez, Resource Engineer at the Pauls Valley Technical Service Office. On hand to present the award were Kevin's mom, Donna Cook, and his children Brent and Lyndsie.

Ms. Dominguez started the year as acting supervisor for the Pauls Valley Watershed staff, on top of her normal duties as Resource Engineer. In May, June, and July, her service area was ground zero for severe flooding. She actively participated in inspections of flood control dams and other potential Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) sites in her service area and was one of the first engineers in the field to complete her EWP contract packets. She completed all this while operating out of temporary office space due to mold concerns in the Pauls Valley Service Center. She was also very active in addressing the mold concerns.

Ms. Dominguez received the award at the Resource Engineers and Civil Engineering Technicians meeting on November 19, 2015. She received an engraved marble paperweight and her name was also added to a plaque that is displayed just outside of State Conservation Engineer, Chris Stoner's office door.



Left to Right: Chris Stoner, Lynnette Dominguez, Brent Cook, Donna Cook, and Lyndsie Cook

Tribal Growers Producers Receive “Hands On” USDA Assistance -

submitted by Carol Crouch, State Tribal Liaison

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development (RD) and Chickasaw Nation partnered with the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC), to hold two conservation workshops. The workshops were held on November 16, 2015 at the Chickasaw Nation Community Center, located in Ada, Oklahoma. The focus of the workshops was to provide the opportunity for tribal growers and agriculture producers to receive “hands on” assistance in completing Farm Bill applications and receive the training on what forms need to be completed in order for a producer to be eligible for USDA programs. NRCS and FSA staff also provided assistance in completing Farm Bill application and eligibility forms. In addition, there was a presentation on the Benefits of a Seasonal High Tunnel and RD covered funding opportunities for tribal growers and producers. Participants were also provided information on USDA's StrikeForce Initiative that was established in 2010 to address specific challenges with persistent rural poverty. The initiative will provide additional Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds for 32 counties in Oklahoma, as well as provide economic benefit to these areas. NRCS, collaborators and partners focused on additional outreach efforts and assistance needed to accelerate the delivery of USDA technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and communities in these counties.



Center: Karl Nail, FSA



Center: Brent Pannell, NRCS



Left to Right:

Clay Horton, NRCS; Tom Roberts, RD; Chickasaw tribal members and Joe Buford provide one-on-one instructions and technical assistance during the networking session. District Conservationists, Stacey Mathis and Russell Wright also assisted during the networking sessions held for both workshops.



Mobile Connections


AGRICULTURE DEPUTY SECRETARY KRYSTA HARDEN ANNOUNCES NEW USDA COMMITMENTS TO HELP BUILD UP NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Agriculture Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden announced a commitment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prioritize \$5.6 billion over the next two years within USDA programs and services that serve new and beginning farmers and ranchers. Deputy Secretary Harden also announced a new, tailored web tool designed to connect burgeoning farm entrepreneurs with programs and resources available to help them get started.

The new web tool is available at www.usda.gov/newfarmers. The site was designed based on feedback from new and beginning farmers and ranchers around the country, who cited unfamiliarity with programs and resources as a challenge to starting and expanding their operations. The site features advice and guidance on everything a new farm business owner needs to know, from writing a business plan, to obtaining a loan to grow their business, to filing taxes as a new small business owner. By answering a series of questions about their operation, farmers can use the site's *Discovery Tool* to build a personalized set of recommendations of USDA programs and services that may meet their needs.

As the average age of the American farmer now exceeds 58 years, and data shows that almost 10 percent of farmland in the continental United States will change hands in the next five years, we have no time to lose in getting more new farmers and ranchers established. Equally important is encouraging young people to pursue careers in industries that support American agriculture.

Using the new web tool and other outreach activities, and operating within its existing resources, USDA has set a new goal of increasing beginning farmer and rancher participation by an additional 6.6 percent across key USDA programs, which were established or strengthened by the 2014 Farm Bill, for a total investment value of approximately \$5.6 billion. Programs were targeted for expanded outreach and commitment based on their impact on expanding opportunity for new and beginning farmers and ranchers, including starting or expanding an operation, developing new markets, supporting more effective farming and conservation practices, and having access to relevant training and education opportunities.


Discovery Tool >

Your Personalized Search Tool

Answer a few questions in our Discovery Tool and we'll pull together personalized information we think will be helpful for you.

[Get Started](#)

16 Counties to Receive Emergency Funds for Critical Flood Control Dam Repairs



Affected counties are: Atoka, Caddo, Carter, Coal, Custer, Garvin, Grady, Hughes, Kiowa, Latimer, Love, McClain, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Seminole and Stephens

Following authorization by Governor Mary Fallin to transfer \$1.8 million from the state emergency fund to qualify Oklahoma for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) emergency funds, these 16 counties will receive critical repairs to their flood control dams.

In 2015, Oklahoma's flood control dams collectively prevented \$280 million in flood damages. By comparison, the average annual cost of maintaining them is \$2 million. Major infrastructure such as Interstate-35 and regional population centers such as Seminole and Wilburton enjoy the protection and economic security they provide. Were the dams around Seminole to go unrepaired, for example, portions of US-270, OK-3E and OK-56 could be washed away during another major rainfall event.

"These small flood control dams act as a network," said NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources Bill Porter. "Together, they can capture fast moving flood water over a wide area and slowly release it downstream. If dams begin to deteriorate, the pressures on downstream towns and infrastructure increase." In the case of Eufaula Lake and its surrounding communities, 297 small flood control dams capture flood water and sediment upstream before reaching the large Eufaula Dam. Many of these flood control dams are included in the upcoming emergency repairs.

Overall, the state has over 2,100 small watershed flood control dams. These dams control the flow of water coming from springs and creeks that can cause damage when they overflow during storms. The additional funds will ensure that these structures will be put back into place and repaired to their original state in order to protect the homes within those area.

Lives and property across the state depend on the safe function of these small flood control dams," said Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) Executive Director Trey Lam. "Even during challenging budget years, we must make provisions to keep our citizens safe. We are grateful for Governor Fallin's wise and prudent decision."

Saltcedar control - submitted by Alan Messenger, Texas County District Conservationist

The Guymon Field Office is assisting a producer with saltcedar control on 2 miles of the Beaver River below Optima Dam. 350 acres of the river floodplain had a moderate to high level of saltcedar infestation. Saltcedar was impacting wildlife habitat, forage production and making cattle management difficult. During planning with Mr. Grounds, he was concerned about the amount of ground disturbance from the traditional mechanical treatment methods, brush piles and large limbs that would take years to decay. Former Oklahoma employee Bruce Meyer, Range Mgmt Specialist, worked with Steve Glasgow, State Resource Conservationist, and Brandon Reavis, Grazing Lands Specialist, on a variance to the Brush Management standard. The saltcedar is shredded with a mulcher during the winter. The limbs are shredded to ground level with no stumps remaining. Regrowth is treated with herbicide within two years. Individual plant treatment of imazapyr and glyphosate is foliar applied. This method of treatment is showing very promising results with a high level of control and minimal effects on grasses and forbs. No hoof problems or lameness has resulted from the shredding operation.



BARKO mulcher shredding saltcedar



Saltcedar regrowth treated with glyphosate and imazapyr a year after mulching

Earth Team Volunteer Receives FFA Honors



Kasey Jo Blevins has been an Earth Team volunteer for three years and was one of the six students who participated in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) High School Pathways pilot program this past summer. Kasey Jo was crowned FFA Queen on October 2, at the rodeo held during the Chickasaw Nation Festival. Each FFA chapter, in Johnston County sold tickets. A percentage of the proceeds from the ticket sales went back to the FFA chapters. Kasey Jo was nominated to represent her FFA chapter by her chapter members. Kasey Jo also made time to work the NRCS informational booth during the festival. Congratulations to Kasey Jo.

Beginning Farmers Series - *submitted by Wynea Buford, McClain County District Conservationist*

On January 19th The Cleveland and McClain County Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Norman and Purcell Field Offices conducted the first Workshop in the New Year for our Beginning Farmers Series. The "Hoop House Heroes" was a resounding success as 47 diverse attendees came to hear Steve Upson from the Noble Foundation speak about Hoop Houses. Wynea Buford, District Conservationist for the NRCS Norman and Purcell Field Offices discussed the Seasonal High Tunnel program available through NRCS, and Leon Sloan a local contractor brought lettuce, kale and strawberries from a Hoop House. It was a great way to kick off our new workshop season!

The Beginning Farmer Series is a part of our FOOD (Fields of Oklahoma Dreams) Workshops that cover topics from Brush Management, Pollination, and Hydroponics to Farm Bill Programs. These workshops have been very successful with participation from Cleveland, McClain and surrounding Counties. We advertise our FOOD Workshops, Board Meetings and Local Workgroup meetings through our local newspaper, flyers in local businesses and Facebook. Facebook has been most rewarding for reaching customers. Below is the event page and pictures from this Workshop and the Cleveland and McClain Conservation District Facebook pages for customers to receive Farm Bill information, outreach/workshop/meeting dates and other topics related to conservation and our environment.


Cleveland CCCD and McClain CCCD



High Tunnel Model by Leon Sloan




**Strawberries from a Hoop House picked
near 01/6/2016**


 **Troy Bounds** January 20 at 9:07am · 🌐


these are awesome events if you a a beginning farmer or a seasoned one
these events are great and are packed with great information and great folks I look foward to attening them thanks to the ones that Mack these events happen




👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share


4 people like this.

 **Cleveland Co. Conservation District** Thank you!!! We LOVE hearing that we help the community, it's our goal!
Like · Reply 👍 2 · January 20 at 9:13am

 **Kathy Moore** Wish every conservation district would be as interested in promoting educational events that assist the community!
Like · Reply 👍 2 · January 20 at 10:29am

 **Catherine Bruce** I was glad to see the turnout, not just quantity but quality of folks! Not one drippy nose or coughing/sneezing fit. And, the children were well and so well-behaved. It was a joy to be there last night!
Like · Reply 👍 1 · January 20 at 1:45pm

 Write a comment...  

 **Wynea L. Buford** 😊 feeling happy.
January 19 at 7:40pm · Norman · 🌐

Thank you all for joining us tonight! We hope your experience was enjoyable and the materials are beneficial to your operation. I hope to see you again on your operation or in another workshop. Please feel free to email or call me for technical assistance regarding your resource concerns. Wynea.buford@ok.usda.gov

(405) 527-3160 🐼 🐻 🐾 🌿 🍷 🍓 🥕 🍎 #NRCS

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Thursday, January 28, 2016 was a successful workshop in the field touring a High Tunnel System (HTS). Our host was a past Season High Tunnel Environmental Quality Incentive Program participant who grows herbs under her system. She spoke about her experience working with NRCS and the financial assistance program, her experience seeking a manufacturer and challenges and successes she's had since the installation of the system. Other speakers were local manufacturers, Leon Sloan and Steve Hill. They provided participants with information regarding the diverse house sizes, styles complexities and simplicities. We talked about resource concerns and practices addressed under the HTS, program application process and eligibilities and land eligibilities. The highlight of the night, besides the High Tunnel, was fresh carrots grown under a HTS! We greatly appreciated the diverse participation of 31 attendees and look forward to seeing each of them in February for our 10th FOOD series workshop!



**FOOD series
workshop**



Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association - Public Official of the Year

J. Chris Stoner, State Conservation Engineer – Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), was awarded the Public Official of the Year by the Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association (OFMA) at a ceremony in Norman in September. According to the OFMA website, "This award is generally given to an official that has implemented public policy initiatives which demonstrate excellence in addressing present and future floodplain management needs for his/her community." Chris was nominated by Leslie Lewis with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. Ms. Lewis is a Bridge Hydraulics Engineer and praised the work of the NRCS flood control dams and the protection they provided for Oklahoma's highway infrastructure. This past spring and summer storms alone, the dams provided more than \$162 Million in benefits – damages that did not occur because of the flood control provided. More recently, storms that occurred around Christmas provided \$27.86 Million in benefits and an additional \$7 Million could have been realized had the remaining 331 dams which are planned but not built been in place. This marks the first time that the Small Watershed Program has been recognized by the Floodplain Association and is emblematic of the efforts of all the Conservation Partners and the Oklahoma NRCS staff involved in that program.



**Leslie Lewis, Oklahoma Dept of Transportation presented award to
Chris Stoner, State Conservation Engineer , Oklahoma NRCS**

Hmong Growers Association - submitted by Michael Ramming, Delaware County District Conservationist



The Hmong Growers Association held an informational meeting in Rose, Oklahoma on October 26th. The meeting was held to pass on information about what cultivars say were or weren't working in regards to growing in Seasonal High Tunnel houses. Michael Ramming, District Conservationist in Delaware County, Natural Resources Conservation Service, gave a presentation on the Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative and accepted applications from those who wanted to apply for this through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Ntzia Cha, pictured talking to the group, was on hand to help with interpretations.



Roger Mills County – Cheyenne FSC – submitted by Greg Allen, District Conservationist

This is the 10th year that the Roger Mills County Service Center has participated in the Downtown Trick or Treat Event. Every year the employees pitch in cash to purchase candy, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service handouts some conservation education pamphlets. This year we handed out "Be a Friend to Pollinators." We had over 120 goblins, witches, policemen, ninjas, and many, many more.



Wewoka Field Service Center – Seminole County - *submitted by Tom James, District Conservationist*

On October 31, 2015, Amanda Stafford, District Conservationist, Holdenville, and Thomas James, District Conservationist, Wewoka, met with Kids at the Circle R Disability ranch in New Model, OK. Soil Health was demonstrated using the smaller table top model. Photo shows Mrs. Tammey Steel with Women in Agriculture, discussing their program. Also discussed was Farm Bill programs.



Stillwater State Office - *submitted by Gilbert Guerrero, State Outreach Coordinator*

The Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Rural Development (RD) at the Farm Bureau 2015 Annual Meeting at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City on November 13th and 14th of 2015. The team had a United States Department of Agriculture booth that had handouts and documentation about our programs and the 2014 Farm Bill. Pictured is Gilbert Guerrero from NRCS providing a Butterfly Bee Seed packet. Also pictured is Kevin Owen from FSA and Trey Lam from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.



Soil Health, Seasonal High Tunnel Benefits, Starting a Vineyard, USDA Programs, Eligibility & StrikeForce Initiative Workshop

Seminole Nation, Chief Harjo and Assistant Chief Lewis Johnson, tribal members, growers and farmers attended a workshop on December 4, 2015. The Seminole Nation hosted the workshop at their Grisso Mansion Annex, in Seminole, Oklahoma. The workshop provided presentations on; the importance of soil health, a rainfall simulator demonstration, benefits of a seasonal high tunnel, how to start a vineyard, importance of soil testing, USDA programs, eligibility process, importance of crop insurance, Monarch Butterfly and the StrikeForce Initiatives. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) and the Seminole Nation sponsored the workshop. Other partners included Rural Development (RD), Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency (RMA), Oklahoma State University (OSU) and the Oklahoma Black Historically Research Project (OBHRP). All partners had informational booths at the workshop. Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS State Tribal Liaison, provided an overview, factsheet and map of the USDA StrikeForce initiative in Oklahoma. Dr. Crouch stated, "This workshop was held to address the resources concerns and training on USDA programs process that the Seminole Nation requested as a result of consultation efforts made by USDA leadership." The workshop was a huge success because of the strong working relations that have been developed with partners and multiagency collaboration.



Steve Alspach, NRCS State Soil Scientist, providing rainfall simulator demonstration to attendees



Right to Left: Seminole Nation, Chief Harjo and Assistant Chief Lewis Johnson network with partners

Multiagency StrikeForce Collaboration a Huge Success for Rural Community

On July 1, 2015, Dr. Carol Crouch, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Tribal Liaison and NRCS StrikeForce Coordinator, coordinated a StrikeForce multiagency meeting with the Mill Creek High school Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor, Justin Reed, to collaborate on technical assistant and StrikeForce funding opportunities available to the rural community. The collaboration with Mill Creek FFA and the USDA StrikeForce coordinators has been ongoing for a year and resulted in the awarding of a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development (RD) StrikeForce community grant for \$50,000. On December 1, StrikeForce multiagency coordinators met with the FFA advisor and students to celebrate the awarding of the grant. Funding from the grant made it possible for the school to purchase a truck and trailer for their FFA chapter. According to Dr. Crouch, "This StrikeForce multiagency team collaboration is just one example of how StrikeForce is having a huge impact on the educational opportunities and economic benefits for this community. These FFA students will be our future farmers and ranchers who will be tasked to be our next stewards of our land and produce enough food to feed our nation." NRCS, RD, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and StrikeForce partner, the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC), are continuing to work with this rural community.



Mill Creek High School FFA Chapter students with their new FFA truck and trailer

Oklahoma NRCS Employee Updates:

RETIREMENTS

Steven Clark, Resource Specialist, Claremore Technical Service Office, effective December 2015

Steven Elsener, Biologist, State Office Water Resources Staff, effective December 2015

Terry Kinzie, Realty Specialist, Stillwater State Office, effective December 2015

RESIGNATIONS

Keenan Arnold, Civil Engineer, Clinton Technical Service Office, effective December 2015

Nathan "Cole" Callaway, Soil Conservationist, Pawnee Field Office, effective December 2015

NEW HIRES

Robert Hathorne, was selected for the Public Affairs Specialist, Stillwater State Office, effective January 2016

New NRCS AFFILIATES

Heather McElhaney, Farm Bill Specialist, Muskogee Field Service Center, effective December 2015

TRANSFERS OUT

Kenneth Hitch, NRCS Oklahoma, was selected for a Natural Resources Specialist position on the Natl CSP team, effective December 2015

REASSIGNMENTS

Tiffany Green, Soil Conservationist at Sulphur was re-assigned to Soil Conservationist, Clinton Field Service Center, effective December 2015

Tommy "Tra" Ketchum, Soil Conservationist at Hollis was reassigned to Soil Conservationist, Poteau Field Service Center, effective December 2015

ACTINGS

Chris Best, District Conservationist, El Reno Field Office, is the acting District Conservationist in Watonga until further notice

Michael Bryan, District Conservationist, Wilburton Field Office, is the acting Resource Specialist for Zone 4 until

Brandon Burns, District Conservationist, Kingfisher Field Office, is the acting District Conservationist, Watonga Field Office until further notice

Andy Bennett, District Conservationist, Frederick Field Office, is the acting Program Liaison in Zone 3

Brandy Pietz-Jones, is the acting CSP Program Manager for a period NTE six months

PJ Martin, Soil Conservationist, Beaver Field Office, is the acting District Conservationist, Beaver Field Office until further notice

Clay Salisbury, Soil Scientist, Clinton Technical Service Office, is the acting Resource Specialist, Clinton Technical Service Office until further notice

Brent Reavis, Resource Specialist, McAlester Technical Service Office, is the acting Asst State Conservationist, Zone 4, until further notice

Kim Walker, District Conservationist, Chickasha Field Office, is the acting District Conservationist, Anadarko Field Office, until further notice

Article Submissions

To submit an article - send to: robert.hathorne@ok.usda.gov